

MINUTES

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING COMMISSION FOR MH/DD/SAS

**Hilton RTP
4810 Old Page Road
Research Triangle Park, N.C. 27709**

Thursday, January 20, 2005

Attending:

Advisory/Committee Members: Ellen Holliman, Laura Coker, Floyd McCullouch, Dorothy Crawford, Tom Ryba, Carl Shantzis

Excused: The adverse weather (icy roads) was a factor preventing attendance for many members.

Division Staff: Judy Bright, Darlene Creech

Others: John Crawford

Handouts: October 12, 2004 Minutes; State Laws Mandating or Regulating Mental Health Benefits; January 17, 2005 letter to Pender McElroy from Rich Visingardi.

Welcome, Introductions and Approval of Minutes

Ellen Holliman called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m.

All members, staff and visitors made introductions. As a new member, Carl Shantzis shared information about his professional background in substance abuse. Mr. Shantzis has a Doctorate in Education and is a Certified Substance Abuse Prevention Consultant (CSAPC). He has his own business in Charlotte called Synergistic Effects.

The minutes of the October 12, 2004 meeting were approved.

Workforce Issues

The members discussed workforce issues related to mental health reform. Ellen Holliman noted that mh/dd/sas professionals are having to transition from providing mostly traditional 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. outpatient visits to providing 24/7/365 services and/or being on call. It's difficult to find, even in urban areas, staff who desire to provide services in this manner. Ms. Holliman stated that several agencies in the Durham area are experiencing difficulty finding staff willing to work weekends and nights. A number of professionals are leaving the field.

Tom Ryba stated that mental health reform has presented a lot of opportunities for public/private partnerships and supports more "blending" of these systems. The difficulty of recruiting and retaining psychiatrists, especially in rural areas, was noted as a significant issue. He also pondered whether or not an incentive package would be possible to retain staff at Dorothea Dix Hospital and Butner as these facilities approach closure. Carl Shantzis discussed the void of certified professionals in the substance abuse field. Many of the early leaders in the substance abuse profession are now aging out. There is a shortage of certified professionals with 5 – 7 years of experience. North Carolina's reciprocity between states for certification is good, Mr. Shantzis stated, so this does support professionals moving in from other states.

Laura Coker noted that public policy has not necessarily supported the development of substance abuse professionals – the issue of stigma still remains. She stated that workforce issues are a major concern to service recipients, all across the disciplines of mh/dd/sas.

The members summarized their discussion about workforce issues as follows:

- Recruitment and retention of psychiatrists and substance abuse professionals is a significant problem.
- Training and retraining of new professionals to reflect shifts in the service environment (24/7/365) is paramount.
- Upcoming retirements of many professionals will leave voids across all mh/dd/sas disciplines.
- Special incentives to retain staff at Dorothea Dix Hospital and Butner as closure approaches might help stabilize the workforce in these facilities.
- A need exists to promote treatment and support systems (through training/staff development) that keep consumers in the community and decrease the need for admissions to state and other inpatient facilities.

The members present unanimously endorsed this slate of issues for study and thought they could fold into the larger issue of "Access to Services" that has been identified as the top issue for the Advisory Committee's attention in 2005.

Legislative Update

Ms. Holliman reviewed issues that were published in the N.C. Council of Community Programs "Hot Sheet." She highlighted three areas:

- Uninsured populations
- Inflationary increases
- SB 163 monitoring of residential treatment facilities

Parity Issues

Tom Ryba distributed a handout entitled "State Laws Mandating or Regulating Mental Health Benefits." This document contained the status of mental health insurance coverage in each state. The information indicated that 46 states currently have some type of enacted law, but that they vary considerably and can be divided roughly into three categories:

1. Mental health "parity" or equal coverage laws
2. Minimum mandated mental health benefit laws
3. Mandated mental health "offering" laws

He reported that in North Carolina, state employees' insurance (State Health Plan) has full parity and this may be a springboard for advocacy and action within the state. He suggested that the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) might be a good organization to present to the Advisory Committee on this issue. The members agreed that mental health insurance parity would fit as a subset under "Access to Services."

Other Issues

Laura Coker noted a need for consumers to be able to give feedback on the Service Definitions that are currently being proposed as part of mental health reform. She stated that consumers and families have been assured by the Division of MH/DD/SAS that as these services are put in place, there can be changes made to the definitions if problems arise in delivery. She urged the Advisory Committee to stay on top of monitoring this issue especially regarding what processes will be used to determine effectiveness.

Floyd McCullouch reported that the January 19, 2005 Rules Committee recommended rule amendments and adoptions to 10A NCAC 27G .1300 – Residential Treatment for Children & Adolescents Who Are Emotionally Disturbed or Who Have a Mental Illness; 10A NCAC 27G .1700 – Residential Treatment for Children & Adolescents Who Are Emotionally Disturbed or Who Have a Mental Illness; and 10A NCAC 27G .1900 – Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility for Children & Adolescents Who Have Mental Illness or Substance Abuse or Dependence. The full Commission for MH/DD/SAS meeting on February 17 will be considering these recommendations.

Ms. Holliman distributed a letter from Richard Visingardi, former Division MH/DD/SAS Director. The letter was addressed to Pender McElroy as Chairman of the Commission for MH/DD/SAS and was a response to the Charlotte Observer's series of articles on Level III Residential Treatment Facilities.

The meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m.